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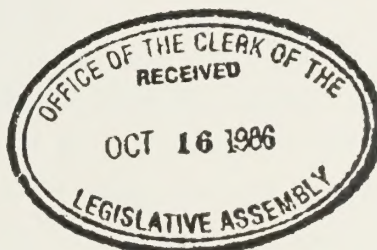
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ROUND PAPER ON MISSING CHILDREN: PROGRAMS AND
POLICIES OF OTHER JURISDICTIONS*

l for:


Committee on
Development

l by:

Gardner
t Chief
ve Research Service

er 1985

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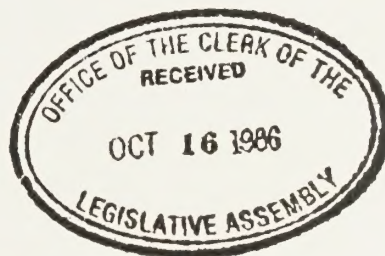
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BACKGROUND PAPER ON MISSING CHILDREN: PROGRAMS AND
POLICIES OF OTHER JURISDICTIONS*

Prepared for:

Standing Committee on
Social Development

Prepared by:

Robert Gardner
Assistant Chief
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December 1985

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children who run away from home or are abducted have increasingly come to be seen as a major problem. The response to this problem has been most extensive and varied in the United States. A wide range of national, state and local private groups are active in publicizing missing children and helping families search for them; fingerprinting and other identification; preventive programs, education and public awareness; publishing literature; counselling; and pressing government for favourable legislation and action. The federal government has taken a number of legislative initiatives, the most important of which established a national resource centre and clearinghouse. Several states have also recently developed comprehensive legislation on the problem of missing children or have established clearinghouses or task forces.

International efforts, most notably the Hague Convention, have attempted to rationalize the treatment of custody rulings and disputes so as to deter parental abductions of children to other jurisdictions. A range of private programs similar to those in the U.S. have developed in Canada. There has also been increasing discussion among public officials of the need for a unified and coordinated approach to this issue. The federal government recently announced a number of initiatives: a central registry on missing children to be run by the RCMP, a national resource and information centre, a national conference in the spring of 1986 and a major research project in Montreal.

INTRODUCTION

This paper surveys public and private attempts to deal with the problem of children missing from their homes. Comparable and reliable data on missing children is often not available. While it is therefore not clear that the number of missing children has significantly increased in recent years, this problem has certainly attracted a great deal more attention, particularly in the United States. Much concern there has focused on the devastating impact of a missing child on individual families and the vulnerable position of children on their own in large cities, especially their possible exploitation in child prostitution and pornography. This concern over dangers to children is in turn linked to more generalized anxiety over wider changes in the family, sexuality and gender roles.

A number of categories of missing children must be differentiated.¹ The vast majority of children reported as missing to the police have run away from home themselves and the great majority of these runaways return within a few days. Closely related to this group are children who are forced to leave home by their parents or guardians, so-called "cast-aways". To understand this general phenomenon, the overall position of children within society and families, and patterns of physical and sexual abuse within families would need to be explored. A second much smaller category is children abducted by one of their parents, generally the parent without custody after the household breaks up. This pattern, which does appear to be increasing, is underpinned by the higher rates of divorce and attendant custody disputes. The final category of missing children is that of criminal abductions, very many of which are never found.

The following sections outline the range of government and community programs that have developed in response to the problem of missing children. The various programs can be concerned with prevention and education, searching for missing children, publicizing cases, legislation, police and judicial practices, and the coordination of all of these efforts. The situation in the United States, where such programs are most extensive and varied, is examined first. Examples from other countries and the development of international conventions on child custody and jurisdictional issues are then explored. Finally, Canadian efforts at the federal level and in other provinces are analyzed.

UNITED STATES

Although accurate data are not available, the federal Department of Health and Human Services estimated that 1.8 million children are missing each year from their homes.¹ Other sources provide more differentiated estimates: between one and two million children run away each year, and approximately 150,000 children are abducted annually by parents and 5,000 to 10,000 by strangers.² One expert estimates that child snatching occurs once in every 22 divorces.³

Federal Government Initiatives

Several pieces of recent federal legislation have been designed to deter parental abductions. The Uniform Child Custody Jurisdiction Act was developed in the late 1960s to encourage greater stability in custody decisions. Its goals are to "deter child snatching and avoid the competition and conflict among courts that result in multiple litigation of custody disputes. It intends to promote the selection of the most appropriate forum and foster cooperation among courts. "All U.S. jurisdictions have enacted the Act, although by no means in a totally uniform way and it is believed to have had a deterrent effect on interstate custody disputes, thus reducing child snatching."⁴

The Parental Kidnapping Prevention Act was passed in 1980 and requires states to enforce and not modify custody determinations of other states. It authorizes the Federal Parent Locator Service, concerned primarily with family support payments, to also be used to find the addresses of abductor parents. The Federal Department of Justice is also directed to apply federal law and the resources of the Federal Bureau of Investigation to interstate parental kidnapping.⁵

Legislation on the Use of Official Mail in the Location of Missing Children was passed by Congress in the summer of 1985.⁶ It directs that a portion of congressional and executive branch mail includes photographs and biographies of missing children. During hearings on the legislation, concern was raised about administrative problems that could result from requiring a specific

percentage of mail to carry this information. There was also concern about the criteria for deciding which cases to include and about the need for adequate provisions to ensure that photographs of found children could be immediately withdrawn. Suggestions were made that the Congressional newsletter could provide a useful solution to such problems rather than departmental or Congressional envelopes printed in bulk, and that there be some type of sunset provision to evaluate the effectiveness of this program. In the end, the bill prescribed only general guidelines for the use of official mail within which the most effective and appropriate means could be flexibly developed by the branches or departments involved.

The most important federal law is the 1982 Missing Children Act.⁷ A number of concerns provided the context for this legislation. The lack of coordination between law enforcement agencies had come to be recognized as a major problem. A very small proportion of missing children were entered into the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer. It was felt that this system had to be expanded to better include children and to take account of the special identification problems of children. There were also arguments for a national clearinghouse for information on unidentified dead individuals, including children. The legislation resulting from deliberations on these issues provided for an administrator within the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to coordinate and plan federal programs involving missing children. The administrator would establish a national toll-free telephone line where any information on missing children can be reported and where information on procedures to reunite children with their guardians can be obtained. There would also be a national resource center and clearinghouse to assist local and state governments, community groups and individuals in locating and recovering missing children; coordinate public and private programs; provide technical assistance to law enforcement and judicial institutions; conduct research; and disseminate information about innovative services, programs and legislation. Grants could be made to public or non-profit agencies to develop programs in these and related areas. An advisory board to advise the administrator and Attorney General was also created.

The administrator contracted with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to carry out these functions as a national clearinghouse and resource center (see Appendix I). The center is a non-profit corporation that had already begun operations at the time the Act was passed. Its key goals are to reduce the incidence of crimes against children and to assist the criminal justice system in dealing more effectively with this problem as it occurs. As well as providing the direct assistance and resources outlined above, the center is also very active in the areas of education, prevention and public awareness. In its first eleven months it developed five publications, including a national directory of support services and programs, and distributed 75,000 copies. By means of its toll-free hotline and other programs the center assisted in finding 1,650 missing children in its first year.⁸

The availability of fiscal resources has been an important constraint on federal programs. Each year the Reagan administration has tried to terminate the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. This has consistently failed because the cost of its programs are modest, it has been relatively successful and it has much vocal support. However, this fiscal restraint has left many programs short of funds and key problems unaddressed.⁹ The administration attempted, unsuccessfully in the current budget, to reduce funds for runaway shelters from \$24 million to \$10 million. Although Congress intended \$10 million to fund the NCMEC and other missing children programs through 1989, the administration provides only \$5 million.¹⁰

State Governments

Legislation pertaining to missing children and patterns of enforcement vary greatly between states and there is only a limited degree of coordination. The National Center found that while some states have passed comprehensive up-to-date laws, other state codes "remain seriously deficient in provisions protecting children. There is a critical need for state and local agencies to share information about the most effective and innovative child protection programs, many of which were made law in 1984."¹¹ Parental kidnapping is treated as a felony in 46 states, up from 39 four years ago.¹²

One of the most active states has been Kentucky. In Louisville, Judge Mitch McConnell became interested in the problem of child sexual exploitation in 1979 when newspaper articles described the Louisville and Jefferson County area as a recruiting point for child prostitutes.¹³ The judge first ordered a thorough police investigation and then established an intergovernmental interagency task force on child pornography and prostitution. He also set up a new Exploited Child Unit in 1980, later renamed the Exploited and Missing Child Unit. Where previously there had been little coordination between social and law enforcement agencies, this unit was composed of teams of social workers and police working across political and jurisdictional boundaries. The Unit has its own computer to enter and collate information on missing children and does a great deal of public education work. The Jefferson County Task Force was asked to testify before several Congressional committees.

The experiences of the task force and special unit convinced Judge McConnell that the problem was state-wide. As a result, the Kentucky Task Force on Exploited and Missing children was established in November, 1982. It published a comprehensive report in September, 1983 recommending a series of legislative changes to establish a state information repository, finance prevention programs, enable youth agencies to check criminal records of their workers, allow pre-trial videotaped testimony of children 12 and under, increase the seriousness of sexual offenses and custodial interference, and make child criminal victims eligible for compensation. It also called for the creation or improvement of fingerprinting programs, call-back programs in schools whereby parents and the police, if circumstances seem suspicious, are immediately notified when a child fails to report to school as scheduled, safety programs for children at school, educational television, specialized police training, local task forces, exploited and missing child units of police and social worker teams in all areas, local volunteer groups and a statewide coalition of concerned individuals and organizations. The legislative recommendations were subsequently enacted in early 1984 through unanimous votes of both the House and Senate.¹⁴

The Kentucky legislation established a state child abuse and exploitation prevention board within the office of the Attorney General to initiate and coordinate prevention programs, education, community efforts and local task forces.¹⁵ A state clearinghouse or central repository of information on missing children was also set up. The clearinghouse must issue flyers with descriptions of these children. Local police are required immediately to pass on missing children reports to the state clearinghouse and from there on to the FBI's NCIC. New Jersey also recently established a State Commission on Missing Persons and a Missing Persons Unit in the Department of Law and Public Safety to oversee and coordinate programs dealing with missing children. Illinois passed comprehensive legislation on missing and exploited children establishing local units to collect and exchange information and organize education and preventive programs. Florida, Kansas, New York and Minnesota have clearinghouses to centralize reports on missing children. Florida requires all state and local police to submit missing children reports to the clearinghouse and operates a statewide toll-free phone line.

A number of states also view the schools as a highly appropriate environment within which to carry out education and preventive programs and aid in the identification of missing children.¹⁶ California has specific legislation outlining school responsibilities to post information on local crisis phone-lines and shelters, work with community groups to implement voluntary child fingerprinting programs, and provide educational presentations on abductions and runaways to all pupils. School authorities must also distribute and post information on missing children and must develop procedures to liaise with appropriate agencies in cases where new students are unable to provide complete records. In order to help identify children abducted by parents, many states require birth certificates or records from previous schools for new students, although in practice such rules are not strictly followed and many children are registered without proper documentation. Many children are enrolled under their proper names far from where originally abducted. Florida and Kentucky require that lists of missing children from the state clearinghouses be circulated to all schools to compare with lists of new students.

Voluntary Organizations

A large number of independent voluntary groups are active in publicizing and searching for missing children, publishing literature on how to avoid abductions, developing fingerprinting and preventive programs, and pushing for legislative changes throughout the United States. A survey by the federal NCMEC listed over 60 state, regional or national organizations and there are many other local grass-roots groups.¹⁷ This section outlines the activities of some of the key groups to illustrate the range of programs and services in operation.

General Programs

- Child Find was founded in 1980 by a woman whose daughter was abducted by the child's father. Although originally concerned with helping to find children taken by non-custodial parents, it expanded its mandate to cover any missing children. Parents can call in information to Child Find's computer register. A directory of missing children, updated bi-annually, is then circulated to school and other authorities. Child Find also advertises its toll-free number for children who have left home. Counsellors refer the children on to appropriate social agencies or use the directory to match them up with their searching parents.¹⁸
- Child Find also has many regional affiliates. For example, Child Find - Missouri reproduces and distributes flyers, provides counselling and referrals, and operates a speakers program.¹⁹
- Like many other organizations, the Adam Walsh Child Resource Center of Florida was formed by parents of a child who was kidnapped to aid other parents. It merged with an existing child advocacy group in 1982. The Center distributes an education program using slides and audio cassettes to teach young children how to respond when approached by strangers. It provides fingerprinting, safety tips for parents and children, information for the media and speakers. It is also active in legislation development and court monitoring.²⁰
- Children's Rights of America was begun in 1982 to provide counselling and direct assistance to parents of missing children. This includes consultation on custody law, coordination of investigation and follow-up after recovery of a child. The group solicits photographs of missing children for dissemination to the media nationwide and recommends attorneys and investigators upon request. The organization has contacts in India, Canada, England and other countries and is continuing to expand its outreach.²¹

Assistance in Locating Missing Children

Many organizations, including those already discussed above, assist in the search for missing children. This can involve operating as a clearinghouse or central registry for information and descriptions, providing practical advice and technical assistance to parents in their search, and liaising with relevant social and law enforcement agencies.

- Families Aware of Childhood Traumas (FACT) of New York City acts as a clearinghouse to provide information to guide parents to proper agencies. It also distributes photographs of missing children, has initiated a safety program in schools, coordinates efforts to raise funds for families of traumatized children and publishes a newsletter.²²
- Search Reports of New Jersey was founded in 1980 to distribute information on runaways to law enforcement, medical facilities and appropriate social services throughout the country. Coverage expanded to include all reported missing persons and listings of unidentified dead. The circulation of its report is 28,000 and it reaches thousands of agencies that otherwise receive little information on the missing. The program also advises families on their legal rights and helps them to work with law enforcement agencies.²³
- Recover the Children, of Seattle Washington, helps families who are having financial hardships in recovering their missing children. It provides families with a one-time grant of up to \$500 and helps other groups interested in establishing a recovery fund.²⁴

Publicizing Missing Children

This also is a common focus of those groups that act as clearinghouses for the distribution of descriptions and identifying information on missing children. Groups work closely with the media to get publicity for particular cases and with the more than one thousand American companies who have become involved in this issue. Most firms put photographs and information on missing children on their products, but some also fund education and prevention programs.²⁵

- A very successful business initiative is Trailway Corporation's "Operation Home Free". Runaways are provided with a free bus ticket home and over 4,000 have taken up this offer.²⁶
- Bekins Van Lines prints brochures intended to help parents understand the reasons why children leave home.²⁷

- The National Child Safety Council, the oldest and largest child-safety organization, has recruited hundreds of businesses. Pictures of kidnapped children are placed on some 2.5 billion milk cartons, 20 billion grocery bags and 45 to 50 million pieces of mail per month. The president of the Council reports that these pictures have helped to find eleven children.²⁸
- The Lost Child Network is a program run by Kansas and Missouri law enforcement agencies since 1984. It places pictures and descriptions of missing children, along with the toll-free number of the NCMEC, on photo-processing envelopes. Through the efforts of the three corporations involved, these envelopes are distributed to photography shops, food chains, national drug store chains, national department stores, military bases and major discount store chains throughout the U.S.A. and Canada. They are distributed at a rate of approximately 10,000 per day, seven days a week, or 42 million per year.²⁹
- Find the Children of Los Angeles was established in 1983 as a result of the TV movie Adam, a movie about the kidnapped Florida child after whom the Adam Walsh Child Resource Center discussed earlier was named. The producer had found while researching the film that many people were not aware of the problem of abducted children and that the media was not being properly used in the search for missing children. Find the Children was formed to rectify these problems. It works directly with the media in getting photographs broadcast throughout the country and produces a 3 to 5 minute segment on a missing child for broadcast weekly on local news. It also supplies newspapers, magazines and television talk shows with photos and information on missing children.³⁰
- The TV movie Adam has proved to be important in another way as well. Each time it is broadcast the film is followed by pictures of missing children and this has led to the identification and recovery of a number of abducted children.³¹
- Pictures and brief descriptions of missing children will be printed on the back of New York State Thruway toll tickets. About 80 million tickets are handed out annually. The pictures could be changed every three months.³²
- The Society for Young Victims, based in New England, coordinates a network of citizens' band and ham radio operators who broadcast descriptions of runaways.³³

Child Identification Programs

In an effort to facilitate the identification of missing children, 35 states have fingerprint programs for schoolchildren.³⁴

- The National Fingerprint Center for Missing Children in Missouri provides free technical assistance to communities and organizations beginning a fingerprinting program. It is an independent central repository for computerized search and recovery of fingerprints. The Center also provides crime prevention materials, public service advertisements, window decals and metal reflective road signs, reading "Our Children Have Been Fingerprinted for Identification", for use in local programs.³⁵
- Childsave, of Concord California, distributes a free registration packet, the "Childsaver Kit", that helps parents assemble identifying information on their children and provides follow-up maintenance service on the kit and photographs.³⁶
- Childkeyppers International of Lake Worth Florida has developed dental charting programs.³⁷

Preventive Programs

A wide range of groups provide "streetproofing" and other education programs for children and parents. The goal is to show children how to safely deal with strangers and to alert parents on how best to safeguard their children.

- Child Watch of Richmond Virginia distributes information and provides speakers to schools, churches and civic groups. It also developed telephone alert and safe home neighbourhood programs, and a retail merchant emergency alert system to prepare security guards and store personnel to react quickly and efficiently when a child is reported missing.³⁸
- Exploited Children's Help Organization (ECHO) serves the Cincinnati, Ohio and Northern Kentucky area with a range of publicity, education and awareness programs. Because many children are abducted on their way to and from school, it has organized volunteers to contact parents whose children do not arrive at school each day. This ensures that the whereabouts of each child is known during school hours.³⁹

Assistance to Children

A further wide variety of groups provide assistance to missing children, mostly runaways. This ranges from shelter, food and other immediate help to those in a very vulnerable position to counselling and assistance in reuniting them with their families.

- Community, Runaway and Youth Services of Reno, Nevada provides pre-runaway, runaway and homeless youth with temporary shelter, as an alternative to the juvenile justice system in some cases. It also disseminates photos of missing children to other runaway and homeless youth programs across the United States.⁴⁰

- New York City's Covenant House is a 200-bed shelter for runaway and homeless children established in 1970. It is open 24 hours per day and turns no one away. The centre provides medical care, counselling, tutoring, job placement and other services. Its workers make special efforts to contact runaways before they come under the influence of pimps and pushers; they feel that the longer young people are living on the streets, the more difficult it is to reach them.⁴¹
- The Bridge, a Boston community non-profit group, provides counselling, medical and dental care, life-skills training, food and shelter. It takes these services to the streets in a mobile van staffed by volunteer doctors, medical and dental students, drug counsellors and social workers. The van parks in areas frequented by runaways and offers hot coffee and sandwiches, as well as counselling. It attempts to work in such a way that the children came to trust the shelter workers.⁴²
- Act Together funds a 24-hour walk-in shelter in Seattle. This facility is also setting up foster homes that will provide longer-term residences for runaways who need professional counselling.⁴³
- Greyhound Lines has billboards in 27 bus stations around the country listing telephone numbers of agencies that assist runaways.⁴⁴
- The Travelers Aid Society helps runaways in the downtown Los Angeles bus terminal to arrange for transportation home or find counselling, shelter, food and clothing.⁴⁵
- In New York, the Port Authority Service Unit of social workers and police officers tries to reach runaway youth in the huge bus terminal before they are approached by pimps and before the runaways get out onto the streets.⁴⁶
- Home Run: A National Search for Missing Children was set up in San Diego in 1983. It operates a 24-hour hotline and both refers runaways to appropriate shelters or agencies and acts as a liaison between runaways and their parents to encourage reunion. Children returning home are provided with transportation if necessary.⁴⁷
- The National Runaway Switchboard has been operating a national toll-free number out of Chicago since 1974. It received about 200,000 calls from young people and their families in 1982. Its number is publicized through television public service announcements, magazine and newspaper articles, and posters in libraries, bus stations and other areas, and it is given out by directory assistance operators throughout the country. The goal of the program is to get the runaway caller off the street. This is done by contacting the nearest shelter to make arrangements to get the child into it. Switchboard volunteers do not attempt to provide counselling over the phone, but they will offer to link runaways up with their parents. The Runaway Hotline in Houston, which receives 200-250 calls per day from runaways, parents and children thinking of leaving home, provides very similar services.⁴⁸

Summary: American Programs

Although the large number of voluntary organizations concerned with missing children provide a wide range of programs, there are also a number of common problems that arise from this approach. The groups tend to have developed in an ad hoc and unsystematic way: many were created by families of children who have gone missing or in response to television movies or highly publicized cases. The result is that the activities of the many organizations are largely uncoordinated; there can be much overlap between groups and important gaps in services. At worst, there could be competition and rivalry between groups.

The operations of these programs are also relatively unregulated. Some could be over zealous in their efforts; for example, aggressive promotion of fingerprinting could exaggerate the danger to children and unnecessarily frighten them and their families. Some groups could be undependable or unreliable; there has recently been a "proliferation of fraudulent anti-kidnapping schemes - aimed at desperate parents of missing children and a public whose fears have been stirred by publicity about abductions by strangers.... In addition to phony fund-raising schemes, officials point to loosely written kidnap-insurance policies, overpriced fingerprint kits and boiler-plate charities that pay fund-raisers handsomely but devote only a small portion of their funds to the finding of missing children."⁴⁹ The high fees of profit-making agencies and private investigators have also been criticized. The Attorney-General of New York has stated that Child Find has misrepresented its services and made misleading claims. Child Find denies any wrongdoing, but agreed to change its promotional material to avoid leaving the impression that it actually searches for missing children and that the investigators it refers parents to search without charging a fee.⁵⁰

The great majority of programs are private, with their own goals and perspectives that are not automatically in the wider public interest. At the least, this means that private initiatives are not part of a coherent public strategy on the problem of missing children or coordinated with other public programs concerned with children and youth. Securing adequate financial resources is a recurrent problem for these groups. Many are funded on an

ad hoc basis, by annual grant or specific project, and this leaves them vulnerable to shifting policies and priorities of government funding agencies and to the vagaries of private charitable sources.

There has been some criticism in the United States that the issue of missing children has become a fad, exaggerated by sensationalized and uncritical media reporting (for example, huge estimates of the number of missing children - the common figure of 1.5 million is 5 per cent of all children 5 to 13 - without the qualification that the great majority are runaways who quickly return home).⁵¹ To the extent that this may be true, the visibility and popularity of the problem of missing children could give way to another issue. A generalized anxiety that children are endangered is also problematic in other respects, especially when the problem of runaway and abducted children is lumped in with other issues such as child pornography, prostitution and sexual exploitation. Such a view does not analyze the links between the different categories of missing children and violence, sexual abuse and the subordination of children within families, the restricted social and economic opportunities of youth and a popular culture that emphasizes mobility, adventure and individual freedom.

There is also a danger of focusing on symptoms - runaway and abducted children - rather than underlying causes - the position of children within the family and overall social structure. An optimum strategy would be geared to both the immediate problem and its fundamental basis. A failure to differentiate the problem of missing children from its social and economic basis can also mean a poor choice of tactics. Thus, it could be argued that at least as important as machinery to locate missing children is the provision of community support services for children that leave home, adequate and accessible shelter accommodation at minimum. Such alternative services are needed so that so many children are not faced with the stark choice between intolerable conditions at home and life on the streets, with all of its dangers.

These points can be seen as lessons or cautions from the U.S. experience. This is particularly important in that American trends and programs tend to be highly influential in Canada. This certainly seems to be the case for the issue of missing children.

OTHER INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE

The problem of missing children has been recognized in other countries, but there does not appear to have been the proliferation of groups and programs as in the United States. In Great Britain the 1984 Child Abduction Act makes it an offense for a parent to take a child out of the country without the appropriate consent of the other parent or the court, if there is a custody order.⁵² There have been a number of instances in which judges have enlisted the press in assisting the search for children.⁵³ There has also been some private activity.

- International Find a Child was established in 1984 by the father of a missing child to comfort parents and assist in search efforts. The group printed and distributed posters and car stickers and organized a special bus to travel about with the pictures of missing children. It organized a meeting, press conference and a "missing children's day" in London to publicize its efforts. The founder published a book calling for a national coordinated record of missing children, a recommendation taken up by a Conservative M.P.⁵⁴

One issue that has been addressed in a systematic way is the resolution of custody disputes between different jurisdictions. The 1980 "Strasbourg Convention" of the Council of Europe attempted to set standards for the recognition and enforcement of custody decrees, encourage cooperation among member states in the search for missing children and deter illicitly taking children across international borders.⁵⁵ At the suggestion of a Canadian delegate, this latter problem was taken up by the Hague Conference on Private International Law in 1976. After four years of study by Conference working groups the Hague Convention was developed and adopted in 1980. It does not specify custodial recognition or enforcement standards, but seeks to deter kidnapping by requiring "the prompt restoration of the custody status quo that existed before the abduction. The speedy return of the child and the reinstatement of the pre-abduction custody status deprive the abductor of any legal or practical benefits of acting outside the law."⁵⁶ It is designed to protect custody rights under the law of the child's habitual residence.

France, Portugal, Switzerland and Canada have ratified the Convention and Belgium, Greece and the United States have signed but not ratified it. The impact of the Convention could be weakened by non-acceding states becoming havens for parental abductions, its one-year time limit on finding abducted children, exceptions to the return requirement, judicial discretion, and a number of loopholes in its treatment of cases arising after custody has been judiciously determined. Nonetheless, the Hague Convention does at least provide a framework within which to address the problem of international child abductions. Particular states can then develop specific legislation to give more force to these general principles.

OTHER CANADIAN JURISDICTIONS

The problem of missing children has recently begun to attract a considerable amount of attention. Reliable data is as difficult to obtain in Canada as elsewhere, but most estimates range from 1,200 to 1,500 children who remain missing each year.⁵⁷

Private Groups

A number of private groups provide services very much like those in the United States: an increasing number of fingerprinting programs, assistance in searching for children, education and public awareness. The largest of these is Child Find with representation in eight provinces, all but P.E.I. and Newfoundland, and the N.W.T. There are 11 chapters in Ontario.

- Child Find's major focus is to help locate missing children. To this end it takes registrations from parents and circulates its list of missing children. All branches work to generate publicity on each case and photos and flyers are distributed.⁵⁸
- Victims of Violence from Edmonton also publishes flyers and leaflets on missing children and has had them put up in some 8,000 post offices across the country.⁵⁹
- A program called "All About Me ID" operates in Saskatoon. With the support of several corporate sponsors and T.V. stations, a passport has been developed that includes a child's picture, fingerprints and medical history, as well as preventive information.⁶⁰

- Child Find has had considerable success enlisting the major media in efforts to locate missing children. Every Friday morning CTV broadcasts nationally a role call of missing children. The Canadian Press Wire Service carries photographs of two children each week which any of its subscriber newspapers can pick up. Child Find also works with local media where possible; CHCH television in Hamilton publicizes missing children on its news. Mediacom has put posters up in its advertisement space in bus shelters.⁶¹

Business Involvement

A large number of Canadian businesses have expressed interest in becoming involved in efforts to address the problem of missing children. However, many have hesitated to becoming directly active. There is some feeling in official circles that business is waiting for government to take the initiative, to provide a central authority to map out areas of responsibility and approve overall programs. Child Find also plans to proceed much more cautiously with, for example, putting photographs of missing children on products than in the U.S. Their major concern is how quickly such photographs can be pulled out of circulation when a child is located. It was this type of question, as well as police wariness, that led the National Dairy Council to reject a plan to print photos of missing children on milk cartons.⁶²

Nonetheless, a number of businesses have become involved in publicizing missing children.

- Olympic Bacon of Saskatchewan puts photos on their bacon wrappers for one month. Cuddy Farms of London carries large pictures of missing children on the outside of its trucks.⁶³
- Child Find is working with the Canadian Gas Association on the possibility of inserting flyers on missing children in monthly gas bills.⁶⁴
- McDonald's Restaurants, in conjunction with Child Find, ran a series of public awareness advertisements in Kids Toronto aimed at finding missing children.⁶⁵
- Personal child identification booklets, a fingerprinting program and a public awareness advertising campaign were undertaken at 200 IGA and Food City stores throughout Ontario in response to a child murder.⁶⁶
- In London pictures of missing children were displayed in the 170 cabs of U-Need-A-Cab Ltd. Area Mother's restaurants agreed to post pictures in their lobbies and have donated 500 balloons to be released with a picture attached to each.⁶⁷

- The Delta hotel in Ottawa puts pictures and information on the back of its restaurant menu along with Child Find's phone number.⁶⁸

Government Actions

There has been considerable discussion recently within the various levels of government on the need for a unified and coordinated approach to missing children. The need for more uniform legislation on custody has been recognized; efforts have been underway in other provinces to adapt Ontario's uniform child custody law as a model.⁶⁹ It is hoped that such uniformity and consistent recognition of other provinces' jurisdiction would deter parents kidnapping children in the hope of securing a favourable judgement elsewhere. In a similar vein, the adoption of the Hague Convention on international abductions is underway in various provinces. Ontario is currently developing a provincial registry of support and custody orders, to be operational by the fall of 1986. This will not include details on access provisions but could potentially help to trace parents who have illegally abducted children along the lines of the U.S. Federal Parent Locator Service.

Federal Initiatives

On December 17, 1985 Federal Solicitor General Perrin Beatty announced a series of initiatives (see Appendix 2).

- A Central Registry on Missing Children will be established by the RCMP in Ottawa. This will be connected to the existing Canadian Police Information Centre which is linked to most police departments in Canada. The registry will differentiate missing children from adults in the computer file, include a separate computerized clothing and dental file, facilitate the coordination of information and police investigations, publish regular national bulletins and other publicity on missing children, and generate reliable statistics. The registry will be linked to similar information systems in the U.S. and to Interpol, and is hoped to be operational by July, 1986.
- A Canadian Information Centre on Missing Children will be established for the exchange of information and the coordination of efforts across Canada. The government hopes that private groups already active in this area will get involved in the centre and that it can become an important clearinghouse.
- The Solicitor General proposed that May 25 be designated as National Missing Children Day to publicize this issue and preventive measures that can be taken.

- A national conference of officials of all levels of government, police and the voluntary sector will be called in the spring of 1986 to facilitate wide consultation and the exchange of information and ideas.
- A major research project on missing children will be set up in Montreal.

These federal initiatives are part of increasing official discussions of the need for coordinated policies and programs. Such consultation and deliberations are seen to be a key initial stage in developing a more cohesive and comprehensive approach that can link up the many voluntary and public efforts.

FOOTNOTES

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- ⁶ Legislative History, Use of Official Mail in the Location of Missing Children, House Report No. 99-226, 25 July 1985, pp. 280-82.
- ⁷ Legislative History, Missing Children Act.
- ⁸ U.S. News and World Report (19 August 1985) :61.
- ⁹ Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, 43: 18 (4 May 1985) :834.
- ¹⁰ U.S. News and World Report, (19 August 1985) :62.
- ¹¹ National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Selected State Legislation: A Guide for Effective State Laws to Protect Children, (Washington: The Center, January 1985), p. V.
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- ¹³ Bill Bardenwerper and Nancy Tafel, "Kentucky's Response to a Growing National Tragedy: America's Exploited and Missing Children," Current Municipal Problems 11 (Fall 1984) :123-35.
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- 22 Ibid., p. 18.
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58 Interviews with representatives of Ontario Child Find headquarters at 1-800-387-7962, December, 1985.

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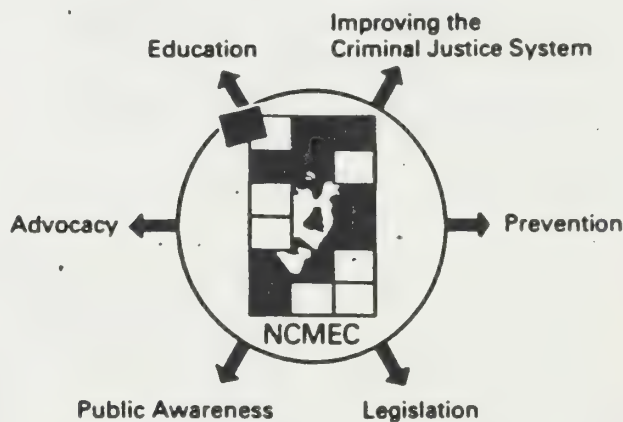
APPENDIX I

National Center for Missing and
Exploited Children

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

- provides training assistance to law-enforcement and child protection agencies to develop effective procedures to investigate and prosecute cases of missing and exploited children
- assists individuals, groups, agencies, and state and local governments involved in investigating and prosecuting cases of criminally or sexually exploited children
- provides information and advice on effective state legislation to assure the safety and protection of children
- provides prevention and education programs for parents, schools, action groups, agencies, communities, volunteer organizations, law enforcement, and local, state, and federal institutions
- distributes comprehensive instruction packages to aid communities in protecting children
- organizes networks of information among school systems, school boards, parent-teacher organizations, and community organizations about proven techniques for implementing educational programs
- conducts an outreach program to alert families, communities, the criminal justice system, and concerned organizations about the nature and extent of child victimization and exploitation
- ensures coordination among parents, missing children groups, and the media to distribute photos and descriptions of missing children
- coordinates the exchange of information regarding child exploitation

The Center is a primary resource for assistance and expertise in all these areas:



Toll-free Hotline

The Center maintains a toll-free telephone number for those individuals who have information that could lead to the location and recovery of a missing child. Because these calls can literally be a matter of life or death, we ask that the Hotline number be used by those individuals who have this critical information. If you know the location of a missing child, please call this number:

1-800-843-5678

Information Please

The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children offers a national clearinghouse that collects, compiles, exchanges, and disseminates information. Anyone who is seeking information or who wishes to contribute information about the problem should write to the following address:

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
1835 K Street, N.W., Suite 700
Washington, D.C. 20006

Board of Directors
National Center for Missing and Exploited Children

Ernest E. Allen, Esq., *Chairman*
Director of Public Health and Safety
City Hall
601 West Jefferson
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

Linda Barker
Family and Friends of Missing Persons
Jane Adams Building
11051 34th Avenue, N.E.
Seattle, Washington 98125

Daniel Broughton, M.D.
Department of Pediatrics, Mayo Clinic
200 First Street, S.W.
Rochester, Minnesota 55905

Robble Callaway
Director of Government/United Way
Relations
Boys Clubs of America
611 Rockville Pike
Rockville, Maryland 20852

John Clinkscale
Find Me, Inc.
P.O. Box 1612
LaGrange, Georgia 30241-1612

Howard Davidson, Esq.
National Legal Resource Center for
Child Advocacy and Protection
American Bar Association
1800 M Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

Inspector Seth Goldstein
Office of the District Attorney
70 West Hedding Street
San Jose, California 95110

Sheriff James T. Hickey
Nueces County Sheriff's Office
P. O. Box 1940
Corpus Christi, Texas 78403

Greg Loken, Esq.
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460 West 41st Street
New York, New York 10036

Pearla Kinsey Peterson
National Child Search, Inc.
P. O. Box 800038
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73180

Professor J. Kerry Rice
Kent School of Social Work
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky 40208

Kathy Rosenthal
Children's Rights of America, Inc.
2069 Indian Rocks Road, #B
Largo, Florida 33544

Richard Ruffino, *Vice Chairman*
New Jersey Missing Persons Commission
Department of Law and Public Safety
R.J. Hughes Justice Complex
8th Floor, CN081
Trenton, New Jersey 08625

Detective Carolyn P. Simmons, *Secretary*
2658 High Street
Portsmouth, Virginia 23707

Lt. Bill Spaulding, *Treasurer*
Louisville Division of Police
633 West Jefferson Street
Louisville, Kentucky 40202

.

APPENDIX 2

Federal Government Initiatives, December 1985

News Release

Communiqué

PR/07

December 17, 1985

PERRIN BEATTY ANNOUNCES NATIONAL INITIATIVES ON MISSING CHILDREN

MONTREAL—Perrin Beatty, Solicitor General of Canada, today announced a major initiative to deal with the problem of missing children in Canada.

Central Registry on Missing Children

"The RCMP will be creating a Central Registry in Ottawa to assist police forces and concerned agencies across Canada in locating and identifying missing children. This registry will be linked with the Canadian Police Information Centre, which now has on-line terminals in almost all police departments in Canada. It will also be linked with similar information systems in the United States and through Interpol, to the rest of the world. Plans are to have this registry operational by July, 1986," said Mr. Beatty.

The Registry will contain information on all missing children reported by police departments across Canada. This information will enable all police to be better and more quickly informed about missing children.

A computerized clothing and dental file will also be established, and linked with the missing children's file.

The registry will publish regular national bulletins on missing children providing consistent and accurate information to help police cross-check and verify leads, and alert them to new cases that may be in their jurisdiction.

"The registry will also generate national statistics on missing children. The lack of such data has hindered the development of appropriate responses to the problem," said Mr. Beatty.

Canadian Information Centre on Missing Children

The Minister also proposed the establishment of a Canadian Information Centre on Missing Children for the exchange of information about effective programs and the coordination of efforts across Canada. "I hope that private sector groups already involved with missing children will be involved with such a centre. Its general role and functions will need to be the subject of consultations with federal and provincial governments and the voluntary sector.

National Missing Children Day

"I also propose that a day be set aside as National Missing Children Day. I believe it would be useful to bring to the attention of the public measures they can take to minimize the chances of their children becoming victims. May 25 is the date I am looking at for Missing Children Day. This date has already been chosen by some voluntary agencies for this purpose and I believe that the coordination of events in different parts of the country will add to their effectiveness."

National Conference

The Minister proposed a wide consultation on the issue with other levels of government, police and voluntary groups with a view to developing a comprehensive approach to the problem.

"My Ministry will convene a national conference on missing children to ensure that our efforts reflect the needs of all those working in the area. I will be inviting representatives from all levels of government in addition to the police and the voluntary sector. The conference will provide a forum for an exchange of information and ideas and to discuss action that can be taken over the next year or two."

Missing Children Research Project

Mr. Beatty said that through the cooperation of the Quebec government and the Montreal Urban Community (MUC), Montreal will be the first site of a major research project studying the problem of missing children.

"This research is absolutely necessary in helping the police to work with the community, governments, and the private sector to improve methods of prevention and investigation, and in the locating of missing children.

"We need to know the true extent and nature of the problem and its links with other problems such as family violence, child abuse, and delinquency," said Mr. Beatty.

The Montreal Research Project will be steered by a committee composed of representatives from the Quebec Government, the MUC police, and the Ministry of the Solicitor General.

"We hope to have the Montreal research project up and running within three months, and we are also consulting with other jurisdictions in Canada in order to identify other sites for parallel research," said Mr. Beatty.

For more information:
Blaine Harvey
(613) 991-2807



Solicitor General
of Canada

Solliciteur général
du Canada

News Release

Communiqué

OPENING REMARKS BY THE
HON. PERRIN BEATTY
SOLICITOR GENERAL OF CANADA
AT THE PRESS CONFERENCE ON
MISSING CHILDREN - MONTREAL
DECEMBER 17, 1985

Check against delivery

Canada

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0P8
613 995-4811

Eight days from now, it will be Christmas. For most Canadians, Christmas is a time to be shared with friends and family, but, for a growing number of our fellow citizens, it will be a time of heartbreak and loneliness. They will spend Christmas thinking of their children who have disappeared.

No one can say how many children are missing in Canada: we simply don't have the information it would take to be sure. However, it seems likely that they number in the thousands: children stolen by strangers or abducted by estranged parents, children who have run away, or children who have simply disappeared.

As a parent, I feel strongly for those whose children are missing for any reason. Because Christmas is a time for families to be together, I believe this to be an appropriate time to announce a new program to reduce such occurrences and to alleviate suffering when we cannot prevent it. Crime Prevention and Justice for Victims of Crime are two of my high priorities, and the problem of missing children is an important aspect of both.

I am fully aware that the main responsibility for prevention, investigation and detection of missing children is local and provincial. However, the problem of missing children respects no boundaries. It requires national and even international cooperation. We must work together in a concerted and coordinated effort, involving federal, provincial and local governments, law enforcement agencies, social service agencies, voluntary organizations and the private sector.

The announcements I am making today are of two types. One is of a specific project to be carried out here within the Montreal Urban Community: this project will lay the foundations for research to be conducted in other cities across Canada.

The remainder of my announcements have a more national character and include the establishment of a Central Registry for Missing Children, the sponsoring of a national conference to bring together all involved parties, and proposals for a Canadian Information Centre on Missing Children and for a National Missing Children Day.

As Solicitor General, I am responsible for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I want to use my position to promote a national effort to decrease the numbers of abductions and kidnappings, and to prevent or decrease the misery associated with children running away from home or from institutions.

While there has been a great deal of speculation about the magnitude of the problem, we have yet to gain an accurate picture of the situation. What we do know is that missing children are the concern of all Canadians, whether they have been stolen by strangers, or abducted by one of their parents in a custody and access dispute, whether they are children who run away from their own homes or institutions, or those who simply disappear. Our concerns are for all types of missing children, knowing the risks facing these young people and the needless suffering their families are forced to endure.

But whatever the magnitude, we must ensure that each instance - each missing child - be treated as an important problem, a serious problem and that the police with voluntary organizations and the private sector, handle each case in the most expeditious, effective and humane way.

While I am initiating certain activities on the part of my Ministry, I wish to stress that I see my role here as starting the ball rolling, or getting the concerned parties together to collaborate, all providing expertise from their own spheres of responsibility.

As the first part of the missing children program, the RCMP will be creating a **CENTRAL REGISTRY** in Ottawa to assist police forces and concerned agencies across Canada in locating and identifying missing children. This Registry will be linked with an enhanced missing persons file at the Canadian Police Information Centre, which now has on-line terminals in almost all police departments in Canada. It will also be linked to similar information systems in the United States and, through Interpol, to the rest of the world. Plans are to have this registry operational by July 1986.

The primary benefits of this service include the following: **FIRST**, information on all missing persons reported by police departments will be stored in the computer file; within this category a distinction will be made between adults and children. **SECOND**, a separate computerized clothing and dental file will be available for search and will be linked to the missing persons file. **FURTHER**, the registry will facilitate police investigations and the coordination of information with a view to publishing national bulletins and other forms of publicity on missing children.

Once this registry is in action, it will be possible to have national statistics on the number and types of children reported missing in Canada, which is something we do not have now.

This current lack of information on the nature and magnitude of the problem of missing children in Canada is indeed one of the major difficulties. To improve our knowledge base, I am pleased to announce that, with the collaboration of the Province of Quebec and the Montreal Urban Community, the M.U.C. Police Force has agreed to serve as the first research site in Canada.

The purpose of the RESEARCH PROJECT is to help the police, working with governments, the private sector and the community to improve methods of prevention, of investigation and of locating missing children. It will also increase our understanding of the true extent and nature of this problem and its links with other problems, such as family violence, child abuse and delinquency.

We expect the Montreal research project to be up and running within three months. The information acquired will be available to both levels of government, to police, and to agencies and groups concerned about missing children.

A Steering Committee has been formed to establish the parameters of the research project; the committee consists of representatives from the Province of Quebec, and the Montreal Urban Police Force, the RCMP and my Ministry Secretariat. While the Montreal research project is the first, we will be consulting with other jurisdictions in order to identify other sites for parallel research.

As I stated earlier, the problem of missing children is complex and it will require ongoing consultations between federal and municipal governments, and provincial and municipal police forces, as well as the voluntary sector.

In addition to these ongoing consultations, my Ministry will, in the Spring, convene a National Conference on Missing Children to ensure that our efforts reflect the needs of all those working in the area. I will be inviting representatives from all levels of government, in addition to the police and the voluntary sector. The conference will provide a forum for an exchange of information and ideas, and to discuss action that can be taken over the next year or two.

I propose the establishment of a **CANADIAN INFORMATION CENTRE ON MISSING CHILDREN** for the exchange of information and the coordination of efforts across Canada. I hope that private sector groups already involved with missing children will be involved in such a centre. While its general role and functions will require consultations with other levels of government and the voluntary sector, it could have an important role as a clearing house for the exchange of information on effective prevention programs.

We must consider all mechanisms to involve community resources in tackling this problem. One of the first steps in this direction will be to inform the public about the issues involved. In this respect, I am proposing that a day be set aside as **NATIONAL MISSING CHILDREN DAY**. I believe it would be useful to inform Canadians of the measures they can take to minimize the chances of their children becoming

victim to any of the situations mentioned earlier. The intention of such a day would be to increase awareness of the problem and to promote means of combatting it.

May 25 is the date I am looking at for Missing Children Day. This date has already been chosen by some voluntary agencies for this purpose and I believe that the coordination of events in different parts of the country will add to their effectiveness.

I call upon Canadians everywhere to join us in developing more effective ways of responding to the problem of missing children. Together, we can ensure that scores of families that would otherwise suffer the pain of losing a child, will be able to look forward to Christmas next year with joy and enthusiasm.

Parents abduct most children, police say

By Rodie Dimuzio Toronto Star

Thousands of children disappear every year in Canada, but only a tiny fraction are actually abducted by strangers.

And both police and organizations looking for lost children want to make sure that the growing attention given to missing youngsters does not create "unnecessary hysteria" among parents, who really have little cause to fear that unknown psychopaths will snatch away their loved ones.

"I don't think we need to make the problem more serious than it is, because only a small percentage of children who go missing are abducted by criminals," says RCMP Superintendent Charles Michaud, who is co-ordinating Canada's new nation-wide registry for missing children. "We don't want to play with fear. But many missing children are lost."

No current, reliable estimates exist on the number of children missing in Canada, but a 1976 report compiled by the Canadian Centre for Justice in Ottawa (which has yet to be updated) put the figure at about 2,000.

Custody battles

Of those missing children, about 5 to 10 per cent — from 100 to 200 children — are believed to have been abducted by persons unknown, according to police officials and representatives of Child Find Canada Inc., the citizens' organization which helps

Clark says the increasing number of missing children is a very serious problem, but he doesn't want parents to get "panicky" about child abduction. "Many people out there are under the impression that there are a lot of men in trenchcoats stealing kids. But that just isn't the case."

Of all the cases investigated by Metro in 1984, Clark says there was only one reported instance of a child abducted by a stranger during that whole time. "And he was arrested within 20 minutes."

Over the same period, police dealt with 60 cases of parental abductions, but by the end of the year, only 23 of those cases were still outstanding.

"In many cases, we knew where the children were but we couldn't get to them because the parent had taken them out of the country," says Clark. (Only four countries have extradition treaties with Canada dealing with parental abductions.)

Clark also says that he has only six long-term stranger abduction cases currently on file, covering the past 10 years.

Even with such a high recovery rate, Clark still advises parents to report their missing children immediately to police. "Look under the bed first and in the fridge," he says. "Even if the kids are only gone for 10 minutes, phone the police."

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6 cases on file

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This week's announcement by Solicitor-General Perrin Beatty that the RCMP will set up a na-

tional registry, to be operating by July, is "the best news I've heard all year," says Clark. "It's like a Christmas present — but long overdue."

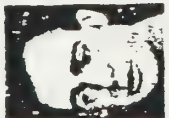
Clark says the registry will enable police to watch crime patterns and transit movement across the country. This information could tip investigators off to another Clifford Olson, before more lives are lost. A child abducted and murdered in Vancouver, says Clark, may seem like a local tragedy until compared with a similar unsolved abduction in another Canadian city.

Barbara Snider, controller for the Oakville-based Child Find chapter in Ontario, says the association's own records show about 94 per cent of missing children are abducted by one of their parents.

"I think you can say that stranger abduction is not a big problem in Canada, certainly not the way it is in the U.S.," she says. "And we don't want to create paranoia or needless hysteria. But parents should work with their kids on what they should do if a stranger stops them. That should be just another life skill which children are taught."

Julie Cullen, head of the British Columbia chapter of Child Find (and one of the organizers behind a proposed national Child Find association), cautions parents not to let their fear of madmen harming their children get out of hand.

"I would tell parents not to let this thing run away with them,"



Beatty

abducted by parents, runaways, and children taken by strangers. When the new registry is established, these distinctions will be included. Also, the existing on-line system will be modified to include files on clothing and dental charts.

Inspector James Clark, who heads the Metro police family and youth services department, says police check out about 5,000 reports of missing children every year in the Metro area, although in most cases the children are back home within 48 hours.

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CORRECTION

We wish to draw your attention to the following in our current 'Christmas Wrap-Up Sale' flyer: Page 1. Due to the unprecedented demand for the Pulsar VHS video cassette recorder (44-1839-8), all stores may not have stock. Rain-checks will be available. Please allow up to five weeks for availability. Page 4. Candle holders, #51-8915-4. Copy reads: '2.99 set. Candles extra'. This is incorrect. Should read: '2.99 each'. The candles are included.

We sincerely regret any inconvenience we may have caused you.

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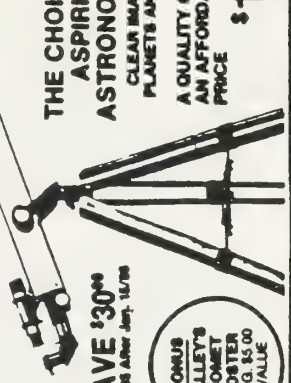
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News Release

Communiqué

PR/07

Le 17 décembre 1985

PERRIN BEATTY ANNONCE DES MESURES NATIONALES POUR FAIRE FACE AU PROBLÈME DES ENFANTS DISPARUS

MONTREAL--Le Solliciteur général du Canada, M. Perrin Beatty, a annoncé aujourd'hui des mesures nationales pour faire face au problème des enfants disparus.

Bureau national d'enregistrement des enfants disparus

"La GRC mettra sur pied, à Ottawa, un Bureau national d'enregistrement des enfants disparus. Ce bureau aidera les services de police et les organismes intéressés dans tout le pays à retrouver et à identifier les enfants disparus. Il sera relié au Centre d'information de la police canadienne, qui a des terminaux dans presque tous les services de police au Canada. Le Bureau sera aussi relié à des systèmes d'information semblables aux États-Unis et, par l'intermédiaire d'Interpol, au reste du monde. Il devrait être en place d'ici juillet 1986", a déclaré M. Beatty.

Le Bureau contiendra toutes les données transmises par les services de police concernant les enfants disparus. Les services de police seront ainsi mieux informés et de façon plus rapide.

Un fichier contenant l'information vestimentaire et dentaire sera relié à celui des enfants disparus.

Le Bureau publiera régulièrement des bulletins nationaux contenant des renseignements détaillés afin d'aider les services de police à vérifier les pistes et à faire des recoupements, et de les informer des nouveaux cas relevant de leur compétence.

"Grâce à ce bureau, nous posséderons des statistiques nationales sur les enfants portés disparus. Le manque d'information nous a empêchés jusqu'à maintenant de trouver des solutions appropriées à ce problème", a déclaré M. Beatty.

Centre canadien d'information sur les enfants disparus

Le Ministre a proposé par ailleurs la création d'un Centre canadien d'information sur les enfants disparus qui communiquera des renseignements sur les programmes efficaces et coordonnera les efforts déployés au pays. "J'espère que je pourrai compter sur l'aide des groupes du secteur privé travaillant déjà dans le domaine. Le mandat et les fonctions de ce centre devront faire l'objet de consultations entre le gouvernement fédéral, les provinces et les organismes de bénévolat."

Journée nationale des enfants disparus

"Je propose de créer une journée nationale des enfants disparus. Cette journée attirera l'attention des Canadiens sur les mesures qu'ils peuvent prendre pour réduire au minimum les risques que courent leurs enfants. Le 25 mai me paraît une date appropriée; c'est d'ailleurs celle qui a été choisie par certains organismes de bénévolat. J'estime qu'en coordonnant les activités partout au pays nous en augmenterons l'efficacité."

Conférence nationale

Le Ministre a proposé la tenue de consultations importantes avec les différents paliers de gouvernement, les services de police et les organismes de bénévolat en vue de mener une action concertée pour faire face au problème des enfants disparus.

"Mon Ministère organisera une conférence nationale sur les enfants disparus pour s'assurer que les efforts déployés répondent bien aux besoins de tous ceux qui oeuvrent dans ce domaine. J'y inviterai des représentants de tous les ordres de gouvernement ainsi que des services de police et des organismes de bénévolat. J'estime qu'en coordonnant les activités partout au pays nous en augmenterons l'efficacité."

Programme de recherche sur les enfants disparus

M. Beatty a déclaré que, grâce à la collaboration de la province de Québec et de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal (CUM), Montréal sera le siège d'un projet-pilote axé sur la recherche des enfants disparus.

"Ce projet de recherche est absolument nécessaire pour aider la police à collaborer avec les gouvernements, le secteur privé et la collectivité en vue d'améliorer les méthodes de prévention, d'enquête et de dépistage des enfants portés disparus."

"Nous devons mieux comprendre l'ampleur et la nature réelle de ce problème, ainsi que ses liens avec d'autres problèmes, tels la violence familiale, la brutalité à l'égard des enfants et la délinquance", a précisé M. Beatty.

Le programme de recherche de Montréal sera dirigé par un comité composé de représentants de la province de Québec, de la police de la CUM et du ministère du Solliciteur général du Canada.

"D'ici trois mois, le programme de recherche de Montréal devrait être en branle. D'autre part, nous entendons consulter d'autres instances pour déterminer si d'autres villes se prêteraient à des projets analogues", a ajouté M. Beatty.

Pour de plus amples renseignements:

Françoise Le Prohon

(613) 996-2806



Solicitor General
of Canada

Solliciteur général
du Canada

News Release

Communiqu

REMARQUES DE L'HON. PERRIN BEATTY,
SOLLICITEUR GÉNÉRAL DU CANADA
AU COURS D'UNE CONFÉRENCE DE PRESSE
SUR LES ENFANTS DISPARUS
MONTRÉAL, LE 17 DÉCEMBRE 1985

À vérifier au moment
de l'allocution

Noël approche à grands pas, et la plupart d'entre nous s'apprêtent à célébrer cette fête en famille et entre amis, dans la joie et la gaieté. Mais, cette année encore, bon nombre de Canadiens auront pour seuls compagnons la peine et la solitude. Ce sont les parents d'enfants disparus.

Personne ne saurait dire avec exactitude combien d'enfants sont portés disparus au Canada, mais ils sont sans doute des ^{mille} centaines, qu'ils aient été enlevés par un étranger ou par un conjoint séparé ou qu'ils soient en fugue.

Étant moi aussi père de famille, je comprends la douleur qu'éprouvent les parents dont les enfants disparaissent. Noël est une fête familiale. C'est pourquoi j'ai choisi cette période pour vous annoncer la mise sur pied d'un nouveau programme visant à réduire les disparitions d'enfants et à venir en aide aux parents dont les enfants ont disparu. Ce problème se rattache en effet à la prévention du crime et à la justice pour les victimes d'actes criminels, qui sont deux de mes grandes priorités.

Je sais fort bien que la prévention, les enquêtes et le dépistage des enfants disparus relèvent surtout des autorités locales et provinciales. Toutefois, devant l'ampleur du problème, il faut une collaboration nationale, voire internationale. Nous devons travailler ensemble et coordonner les efforts déployés par les divers ordres de gouvernement, les organismes chargés de l'application de la loi, les services sociaux, les organismes bénévoles et le secteur privé.

J'annonce aujourd'hui la création d'un programme de recherche sur le territoire de la Communauté urbaine de Montréal. Ce programme jettera les bases d'autres travaux de recherche qui seront entrepris ailleurs au pays.

J'annonce aussi plusieurs projets de portée nationale, entre autres la création d'un bureau national d'enregistrement des enfants disparus et l'organisation, par le Ministère, d'une conférence nationale qui réunira toutes les parties intéressées. Je propose en outre de créer un centre canadien d'information sur les enfants disparus et de tenir une journée nationale des enfants disparus.

À titre de Solliciteur général, je suis responsable de la Gendarmerie royale du Canada, et je veux profiter de cette position privilégiée pour favoriser les efforts dans tout le pays pour réduire le nombre d'enlèvements d'enfants et les souffrances causées par une fugue.

Malgré les nombreuses conjectures sur l'ampleur du problème, nous n'avons pas encore une idée exacte de la situation. Le problème des enfants disparus préoccupe tous les Canadiens, que ces enfants aient été victimes d'enlèvement par des étrangers ou par le père ou la mère qui se disputent le droit de garde ou le droit d'accès, que ces enfants se soient enfuis de la maison ou d'un établissement. Tous les types de disparition nous préoccupent, car nous connaissons les dangers auxquels ces jeunes sont exposés et les dures souffrances que vivent leurs familles.

Quoi qu'il en soit, nous devons veiller à ce que chaque cas d'enfant disparu soit traité avec toute l'importance et tout le sérieux voulu. Nous devons aussi nous assurer que la police, les organismes bénévoles et le public s'en occupent le plus rapidement, le plus efficacement et le plus humainement possible.

Même si mon ministère prend l'initiative de certaines mesures, je tiens à souligner que mon rôle consiste surtout à amener les parties intéressées à s'entraider et à mettre en commun leurs compétences particulières.

L'une des premières mesures du programme sera la mise sur pied à Ottawa, par la GRC, d'un Bureau national d'enregistrement des enfants disparus. Ce bureau aidera les services de police et les organismes intéressés dans tout le pays à retrouver et à identifier les enfants disparus. Il sera relié à un fichier détaillé sur les personnes disparues situé au Centre d'information de la police canadienne, qui a des terminaux dans presque tous les services de police au Canada. Le Bureau sera aussi relié à des systèmes d'information semblables aux États-Unis et, par l'intermédiaire d'Interpol, au reste du monde. Il devrait être en place d'ici juillet 1986.

Voici quelques-uns des principaux avantages du Bureau. Premièrement, toutes les données transmises par la police concernant les personnes disparues seront emmagasinées dans le fichier informatique; une section étant réservée aux adultes, l'autre aux enfants. Deuxièmement, un fichier distinct contenant l'information vestimentaire et dentaire sera relié à celui des personnes disparues. Troisièmement, le Bureau facilitera les enquêtes policières et coordonnera l'information en vue de la publication de bulletins nationaux et d'autres formes de publicité.

Grâce à ce Bureau, nous posséderons, pour la première fois, des statistiques nationales sur le nombre et les caractéristiques des enfants portés disparus.

Le manque d'information sur la nature et l'ampleur du problème des enfants disparus est l'un des graves problèmes auxquels nous nous heurtons actuellement. J'ai toutefois le plaisir de vous annoncer que le service de police de la CUM a accepté de se prêter aux premières recherches canadiennes dans ce domaine. Celles-ci seront entreprises avec la collaboration de la province de Québec et de la CUM.

L'objectif du projet de recherche est d'aider la police et de collaborer avec les gouvernements, le secteur privé et la collectivité en vue d'améliorer les méthodes de prévention, d'enquête et de dépistage des enfants portés disparus. Ce projet nous permettra aussi de mieux comprendre l'ampleur et la nature réelle de ce problème, ainsi que ses liens avec d'autres problèmes, tels la violence familiale, la brutalité à l'égard des enfants et la délinquance.

D'ici trois mois, le projet de recherche de Montréal devrait être en branle. Les deux ordres de gouvernement, les services de police et les organismes et groupes concernés auront accès aux données.

Un comité de concertation a été chargé de déterminer les paramètres du projet. Il se compose de représentants de la province de Québec, de la police de la CUM, de la GRC et du Secrétariat de mon ministère. Le projet de recherche entrepris à Montréal est le premier en son genre au Canada. Toutefois, nous entendons consulter d'autres instances pour déterminer si d'autres endroits se prêteraient à des projets analogues.

Le problème des enfants disparus est complexe et nécessitera des consultations suivies entre le gouvernement fédéral, les administrations et les services de police provinciaux et municipaux et les organismes de bénévolat.

En outre, mon ministère organisera, au printemps, une conférence nationale sur les enfants disparus pour s'assurer que les efforts déployés répondent bien aux besoins de tous ceux qui oeuvrent dans ce domaine. J'y inviterai des représentants de tous les ordres de gouvernement ainsi que des services de police et des organismes de bénévolat. À cette conférence, nous échangerons des renseignements et des idées et nous discuterons des mesures à prendre au cours des prochaines années.

Je propose par ailleurs la mise sur pied d'un Centre canadien d'information sur les enfants disparus, qui communiquera des renseignements et coordonnera les efforts déployés au pays. J'espère que je pourrai compter sur l'aide des groupes du secteur privé travaillant déjà dans le domaine. Le mandat et les fonctions de ce centre devront faire l'objet de consultations entre le divers ordres de gouvernement et les organismes de bénévolat. J'estime toutefois que le Centre pourrait jouer un rôle important de coordination des renseignements sur les programmes de prévention.

Nous devons examiner toutes les façons d'amener la collectivité à s'attaquer à ce problème. L'une des premières mesures à prendre pour y parvenir est de sensibiliser le public. C'est pourquoi je propose de créer une journée nationale des enfants disparus. Cette journée attirera l'attention des Canadiens sur les mesures qu'ils peuvent prendre pour combattre ce problème.

Le 25 mai me paraît une date appropriée; c'est d'ailleurs celle qui a été choisie par certains organismes de bénévolat. J'estime qu'en coordonnant les activités partout au pays nous en augmenterons l'efficacité.

Canadiens, Canadiennes, aidez-nous à rendre l'espoir aux familles dont un enfant a disparu. Aidez-nous à faire en sorte que, l'année prochaine, elles puissent célébrer Noël dans la joie et l'allégresse.



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January 6, 1986

Mr. Richard Johnston, MPP
Chair
Standing Committee
on Social Development
Room 319
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario

Dear Richard,

Please find enclosed a survey of programs and policies of other jurisdictions on missing children. Call me at 965-3751, if you need any further information.

Yours truly,

Robert Gardner
Assistant Chief
Legislative Research Service

RG:evi

Encl.



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